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Committee on Conferences

Substantive session

Draft report

Addendum

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I. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources

3. Improved utilization of conference facilities at Nairobi; possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi; provision of interpretation services to other locations from permanent interpretation structures in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi

Introduction and overview

1. With regard to the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the General Assembly, in paragraphs 17 and 18 of its resolution 53/208 A of 18 December 1998, expressed concern that the conference facilities at Nairobi were still underutilized during 1996 and 1997, and reiterated its call for better utilization of those facilities. In paragraph 21 of the same resolution, the Assembly invited all subsidiary bodies of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme and the Commission on Human Settlements, and encouraged Member States, intergovernmental bodies and regional and other major groupings to consider increasing their use of the conference facilities at Nairobi. In paragraph 22, the Assembly reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to assist the aforementioned bodies in improving that situation and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences, on the actions taken to that end.

2. With regard to the possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the General Assembly, in paragraph 19 of its resolution 53/208 A, requested the Secretary-General to explore the possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, in view of the fact



that it had been upgraded to a full-fledged United Nations conference centre, and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

3. At its 418th meeting, on 30 August 1999, the Committee considered the reports of the Secretary-General contained in documents A/54/221 and A/54/262. The representative of the Secretariat also presented an oral report on the matter to the Committee.

4. In paragraph 20 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 A, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, without prejudice to the practices currently used to meet interpretation requirements, to examine the provision of interpretation services to other locations from permanent interpretation structures based in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

5. At its 419th meeting, on 30 August 1999, the Committee considered the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/54/176.

6. At the Committee's 421st meeting, on 31 August 1999, the representative of the Secretariat presented a report on the estimated cost to the Secretariat of holding a three-day session of the Committee on Conferences at Nairobi (A/AC.172/1999/CRP.10).

Discussion

7. Despite some improvement in the utilization rate of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which was attributed to more efficient data-gathering and record-keeping, expansion of the Office's programme of work and efforts to encourage non-United Nations bodies to utilize the facilities, concern was nevertheless expressed at the overall low number of meetings held at the centre. The Secretariat was encouraged to take further initiatives to improve the utilization rate, including through closer cooperation with the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and through specific policies to attract non-United Nations bodies, including private-sector entities.

8. The view was expressed that, by holding one of its sessions at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Committee would draw attention to the problems faced by duty stations away from Headquarters and set an example for other intergovernmental bodies to emulate.

9. Concern was expressed, however, at the cost such an initiative would entail for States members of the Committee, which might discourage their participation in the work of the session.

10. Concern was also expressed over whether such an initiative would be consistent with the provisions of General Assembly resolution 40/243 of 18 December 1985, in which the Assembly reaffirmed the general principle that United Nations bodies should plan to meet at their respective established headquarters.

11. In response to the concerns expressed, the representative of the Secretariat pointed out that, while the headquarters principle reaffirmed in Assembly resolution 40/243 placed the regular session of the Committee on Conferences at Headquarters, it also contained provisions for seeking exceptions to that principle.

12. It was suggested that the Committee should agree on the principle of holding one of its future sessions at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and include a proposal to that effect in the agenda of its next substantive session.

13. While reference was made to the basic conclusion of the Secretary-General in his report contained in document A/54/262, that the creation of a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi might not be immediately cost-effective and

might not result in improved utilization of its meeting facilities, the view was expressed that the political aspects of the proposal must also be considered. Furthermore, from the methodological point of view, calculations of the cost of an interpretation service should include estimates of the income that could accrue to the regular budget on account of reimbursements for interpretation services to be provided to extrabudgetary or non-United Nations bodies that could meet in Nairobi as a result of the availability of an interpretation team. Financial information should also include the costs for the regular budget that could result from the possible need to assign Nairobi-based interpreters to service meetings held elsewhere in order to ensure their full utilization. It was felt, moreover, that as one of the four full-fledged United Nations conference centres, the United Nations Office at Nairobi should in time be equipped with a permanent interpretation service, independently of its needs.

14. The representative of the Secretariat reported on the experiment in remote interpretation carried out earlier in 1999, during which a two-week session held at Geneva had been provided with remote interpretation services from Vienna. The experiment revealed the importance of visual information for the remote interpreters and the need to refine further the video component of the equipment used. Future activities would focus on the experimental servicing from Geneva of a meeting to be held at Nairobi. Discussion would begin shortly to determine whether the Mercure satellite available to the United Nations Office at Nairobi could be used to emulate the ISDN links needed for remote interpretation.

15. The view was expressed that the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/54/176 should be considered to be preliminary. Further reports were needed that would take account not only of technological possibilities but also of the cost benefits of remote interpretation, including the relative cost advantages of the different conference centres that were likely providers of remote interpretation services. Emphasis was also placed on the need to involve interpreters in the development of the new system, as the physical and psychological well-being of interpreters was directly related to their performance on the job.

Conclusions and recommendations

16. The Committee took note of the reports of the Secretary-General on improved utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/54/221) and on the possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/54/262).

17. The Committee took note with appreciation of the efforts of the Secretariat to encourage increased utilization of conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and urged the Secretariat to continue its efforts in that regard.

18. The Committee expressed concern at the low number of meetings held at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and encouraged all bodies concerned to make better use of the conference facilities of the Office.

19. The Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare detailed proposals on the utilization of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, including by non-United Nations entities.

20. The Committee considered that the holding of its sessions at the United Nations Office at Nairobi or other duty stations away from Headquarters could provide an excellent opportunity for further evaluation of the provision of conference services and decided to continue the discussion at an appropriate time and at an appropriate venue.

21. The Committee requested the Secretariat to prepare a comprehensive report on the possible establishment of a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and on the use of such a service by non-United Nations entities.

22. The Committee took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to other locations from permanent interpretation structures in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi (A/54/176).

23. The Committee commended the efforts of the Secretariat to develop a system of remote interpretation, looked forward to additional experiments in the future and requested the Secretariat to further refine the cost considerations of remote interpretation.
